

Alternative Formats Availability and its Utilisation by Visually Impaired Students in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Visually impaired students need alternative format in braille, talking books and large prints to function like sighted students. Because few materials get converted into these formats, the availability and consequent use of alternative format for study and leisure by visually impaired students has been of concern. This study reveals the availability and use of alternative formats by visually impaired students in Nigerian Secondary Schools. The study is a survey and it purposively focused on southwestern, Nigeria. Using total enumeration technique, data were collected 123 students from six purposively selected secondary schools in southwestern Nigeria. A questionnaire having two rating scales on availability and utilisation of alternative format with reliability scores of $\alpha = 0.77$ and $\alpha = 0.73$ respectively were used. 104 (84.5%) of the instrument was correctly administered. The study found, that braille (77%), talking books/tape recordings (65.4%) are not readily available while large prints (96.2%) are not available. Braille is the most frequently used on daily basis (91.3%) followed by talking books (34.6%) while large prints are not used. There was no significant positive relationships between alternative formats availability and its utilisation in the selected libraries. The study recommends increased transcription of information materials into alternative formats for the students, adequate funding from government and donors and the building of a balanced collection of alternative formats in the school libraries.

Keywords: *Alternative Formats, Nigeria, Secondary Schools, Utilisation, Visually Impaired Students*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sighted persons can naturally read and communicate using the types of information materials available such as books, reference sources, serials, internet etc. But for persons with visual impairment, reading and communication comes in alternative format such as Braille, talking books and large prints. This is because the visually impaired cannot use the medium of the sighted owing to the consequence of their visual impairment which result in their being blind, partially sighted or low visioned.

Braille is a six embossed dots tactile device used by the blind as a medium of reading and communication. Talking books are audio recordings from books which the visual impairment can listen to, thereby providing the visual impaired with the opportunity of reading through listening. Large print materials have their print size enlarged such that this becomes visible to a low visioned or partially sighted person [1].

The provision of information materials in schools for the education of visually impaired children has remained worrisome to educationists, producers and providers of alternative formats. A few materials ever get converted to alternative formats. For instance, only five percent of books published in the United Kingdom (UK) make it into alternative format (RNIB, 2006). Without alternative formats, persons with visual impairment cannot read and function well as members of the society. This is why it is crucial for every country to have a well organised arrangement for the production and utilization of information materials by its visually impaired children and citizens [2].

In Nigeria, blind children did not enjoy formal education until 1953 when the first school for the blind was established at Gindiri, Plateau State [3]. The Pacelli School for the blind and partially sighted, a Roman Catholic primary school in Lagos, Nigeria, provides information materials at the primary school level. In many primary and secondary schools, pupils themselves

have been known to make private and individual arrangements for study materials. It is believed that there is acute shortage of information materials and other information resources in alternative format at the primary and secondary school levels [4].

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private associations also make information materials available to visually impaired children in schools. Notable among these are Nigerwives, an association of foreign women married to Nigerian men, the Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association for the Blind (ANWAB), the Nigerian Society for the Blind, Hope for the Blind, Gindiri Material Centre for the Blind and a few others around the country. Some Nigerian secondary schools mainstream visually impaired children with the sighted. Specialised secondary school for the visually impaired is non-existent in Nigeria. Schools with visually impaired students usually keep a sizable collection of alternative formats in an alternate library for the use of their visually impaired students. These schools lack transcription facilities, but they depend on NGOs and private bodies for the transcription of their information materials into alternative formats.

Libraries of secondary schools with visually impaired students in Nigeria are presently faced with the problem of meeting the high demand for information material in alternative formats by students. The visible inadequacies in these schools had made it difficult for the libraries to meet the growing demand for information materials by the visually impaired students.

The task of making alternative format available for use by visually impaired students is not an easy one. In Nigeria, Basharu [5] and Atinmo [4] have highlighted the fact that secondary school persons with visual impairment have visited their school libraries asking for reading materials to either read or borrow. They also bring their printed matter to be transcribed to braille. These schools also contend with shortage of braillists and braille teachers, which has greatly discouraged persons with visual impairment from education and learning.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Several years of observation suggest that there is acute shortage of alternative formats available in

libraries of Nigerian secondary schools with visually impaired students. The schools lack transcription facilities, so very few formats are believed to have been transcribed into braille, audio recordings and large prints for use by the students. Inadequate number of available alternative formats in the school libraries, possibly explains low utilisation levels for the formats despite increased demand. This study investigates the availability and use of alternative formats for visually impaired students in selected secondary school libraries in Southwestern Nigeria.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the alternative format available to visually impaired students in the selected school libraries ?
2. What is the frequency of use of alternative formats by visually impaired students in the selected school libraries ?

4. HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis formulated was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Availability of alternative formats is not significantly related to its use by visually impaired students in the selected school libraries.

5. METHODOLOGY

The study is purposively limited to Southwestern Nigeria and this is because this region has in it, those schools with appreciable number of visually impaired students and information materials in alternative formats useful for this study. The study adopts survey research design and the population of the study is made up of all visually impaired secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria. In Nigeria, few secondary schools admit visually impaired persons as students alongside sighted students as there are no secondary schools specifically meant for visually impaired students. A preliminary investigation by the author puts the number of secondary schools with visually impaired students in Southwestern Nigeria at six. These schools were purposively chosen for the study because they have in them appreciable number visually impaired students with information materials in alternative format useful for this study. The schools have a total population of 123 students who are visually impaired.

Table 1 Profile of Secondary School with Visually Impaired Students

| Name of School | Location | State | Population |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Queens College | Lagos | Lagos | 18 |
| Kings College | Lagos | Lagos | 20 |
| Federal Government College, Ijanikin | Lagos | Lagos | 20 |
| Yewa College | Ilaro | Ogun | 20 |
| Adeniran Memorial Grammar School | Ogbomosho | Oyo | 18 |
| Owo High School | Owo | Ondo | 30 |

Source: Field work, 2008 n = 123

Total enumeration technique was used to cover all the 123 visually impaired students in the six schools. Data were gathered using a questionnaire. The questionnaire elicited information on the background of respondents, the availability and utilisation of alternative formats in the schools. Validity of instruments was achieved through expert advice while reliability of instrument came through pre-test of instrument to visually impaired students at Federal College of Education (special) Oyo who were not part of the study. The questionnaire had two scales on availability and utilisation of alternative formats. The scales had reliability scores of $\alpha = 0.77$ and $\alpha = 0.73$ respectively. The questionnaire was read to the hearing of the respondents and their responses were affected directly on the questionnaire. Out of 123 respondents, the researcher and his assistants were able to administer correctly a total of 104 visually impaired students which represents 84.5% response rate.

6. RESULTS

6.1 The Alternative Formats Available in the Selected Libraries

The study sought from the respondents, the availability of alternative formats which include Braille, talking book or recorded materials and large prints. It was found that Braille materials are not readily available in the libraries surveyed according to 80 (77%) of the respondents; 4 (3.8%) of the respondents thought that Braille books are not available while just one (1.0%) of the respondents said that Braille are available in the libraries. For talking book or recorded materials, the study revealed that 68 (65.4%) and 36 (34.6%) of the respondents said that talking books were not available and not readily available respectively in the school libraries covered by the study. In effect, (100%) of the respondents surveyed are of the view that talking books are either not readily available or not available. The data for large prints shows that large print materials are not available in the schools selected for the study representing 100 (96.2%) while a mere 4 (3.8%) said large prints are not readily available. These results have shown clearly that majority of alternative formats for persons with visual impairment in the libraries surveyed are either not available or not readily available.

Table 2 Alternative Formats Availability in the Selected School Libraries

| Alternative Formats | Readily Available | | Available | | Not readily Available | | Not Available | | Total | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|------|-----------|-----|-----------------------|------|---------------|------|-------|-----|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Braille Materials | 19 | 18.3 | 1 | 1.0 | 80 | 77 | 4 | 3.8 | 104 | 100 |
| Talking Book/ Recorded Materials | - | - | - | - | 36 | 34.6 | 68 | 65.4 | 104 | 100 |
| Large prints | - | - | - | - | 4 | 3.8 | 100 | 96.2 | 104 | 100 |

Sources: field work 2008

6.2 The Frequency of Use of Alternative Formats in the Selected Libraries

From the data gathered on the frequency of use of alternative formats, it was discovered that Braille materials enjoy high frequency of use among the respondents. 95 respondents (91.3%) used Braille materials daily while 6 respondents (5.8%) used Braille two or three days in a week. The survey revealed that the frequency of utilization of talking books or recorded materials among the students persons with visual impairment in the school libraries was less, compared to

Braille materials. 36 respondents (34.6%) use talking books daily. However 17 respondents (16.3%) use talking books once in a week while 22 (21.2%) consult talking books once a month . Large prints according to this study are not used daily. However, 101 (97.1%) said they used large prints once in a month. This low level of utilization for large prints could be attributed to the fact that large print publications and availability is very low in Nigeria and also that majority of the respondents are totally blind and cannot use large prints.

Table 3 Frequency of Utilization of Alternative Format

| Period of utilization | Braille | | Talking Books | | Large Prints | |
|-----------------------|---------|------|---------------|------|--------------|------|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Daily | 95 | 91.3 | 36 | 34.6 | - | - |
| Two/three days weekly | 6 | 5.8 | 26 | 25 | - | - |
| Weekly | 1 | 1.0 | 17 | 16.3 | 2 | 2.0 |
| Fortnightly | - | - | 3 | 3.0 | 1 | 1.0 |
| Monthly | 2 | 2.0 | 22 | 21.2 | 101 | 97.1 |
| Never | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 104 | 100 | 104 | 100 | 104 | 100 |

7. HYPOTHESIS

Availability of alternative formats is not significantly related to its use by visually impaired students in the selected school libraries.

To test this hypothesis, alternative formats availability was correlated with its utilization by persons with visual impairment in the selected school libraries in order to predict the relationship between alternative formats

availability and its use in the libraries. The findings showed a Pearson Correlation Coefficient $r=0.312$ ($P>0.05$) calculated, which revealed no significant relationship between alternative format availability and its utilization. So the hypothesis was accepted. In effect, the availability of alternative formats in the selected school libraries had no positive relationship with its utilization by the visually impaired students.

Table 3 Correlation between Alternative Format Availability and Utilization in the Selected School Libraries

| Variables | N | Mean (x) | Std. Deviation | R | Sig. Value | Remark |
|---------------------------------|-----|----------|----------------|-------|------------|--------|
| Alternative format availability | 104 | 4.72 | 1.49 | 0.312 | 0.25 | P>0.05 |
| Alternative format utilization | 104 | 9.39 | 2.42 | | | |

** Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed)
Decision: Not Significant

8. DISCUSSION

Majority of the students in this study were below twenty years old. Many of them were also above teenage which is an indication of the slow educational progression of visually impaired students. The findings of this study has confirmed that educational space and opportunities for the visually impaired is limited, judging from the few schools that cater for the visually impaired in Nigeria.

The study has revealed that braille materials are not readily available in the school libraries studied. In the same vein, talking books/audio recordings as well as large prints are also not available. This clearly indicates that the level of availability of alternative formats in the school libraries leaves much to be desired and would not complement the teaching and learning activities of the schools. This is not only common in developing countries as Atinmo [2] and Ng'anga [6] have corroborated, but also in many developed countries as reported by Vitzansky [7] and Bruce and Baker [8]; while users have consistently shown strong desire for information materials in readable format.

Braille materials form the bulk of materials available in the libraries surveyed. Talking books are few while large prints were practically non-existent in many of the libraries. Many of the respondents (the partially sighted) complained that they hardly came across large print

materials for use. In summary, alternative formats available in the school libraries selected for this study are inadequate to meet the reading interest and information needs of the visually impaired students. Braille materials available in the secondary schools surveyed were not being used by the students regularly because the materials needed by the students were sourced through private arrangement by the students.

As observed from the result, the most frequently used alternative format among visually impaired students in the school libraries was braille, followed by talking books or tape recordings. The reason for Braille being the most utilized format in this study could be because alternative formats use are limited by availability. Braille is the most utilised because it is the most available.

The study revealed that alternative formats availability in the libraries surveyed is not significantly and positively related with utilization of alternative formats materials. The import of this finding is that availability of alternative format in the libraries studied is not bringing about appreciable levels of utilization. The availability of materials in the libraries is not encouraging or serving as incentive for the utilization of the alternative materials. Utilization of information materials cannot take place unless materials are available; though there is general inadequate information materials in alternative formats for persons with visual impairment in Nigeria.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has brought to the fore the conditions of libraries servicing the visually impaired students in Nigerian schools; in terms of the availability and the use of alternative formats. The study clearly suggest that attention and policy needs to be refocused on making alternative formats available for the use of the visually impaired students in schools. Another implication of the findings of this study is that alternative format use by the students is rather low which is a consequence of low transcription activities of information materials into alternative formats in Nigerian schools with visually impaired students.

The study recommends that increased transcription of information materials into alternative format should be done in order to improve upon the number of information materials in the school libraries. Adequate funds by the government and donors should also be directed for this purpose. They should also balance their collection by increasing talking books and large prints collections considerably as well as braille, such that available formats will adequately address the reading interest and information needs of the students for leisure and academic purposes.

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